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Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 Students

ⓘ ALERT: Please remember that photos submitted to USCIS must be unmounted and unretouched. Unretouched means the photos must not be edited or digitally enhanced. The submission of any mounted or retouched images will delay the processing of your application and may prompt USCIS to require you to visit an Application Support Center to verify your identity.

Optional practical training (OPT) is temporary employment that is directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study. Eligible students can apply to receive up to 12 months of OPT employment authorization before completing their academic studies (pre-completion) and/or after completing their academic studies (post-completion). However, all periods of pre-completion OPT will be deducted from the available period of post-completion OPT.

Types of OPT

All OPT must be directly related to your major area of study. If you are an F-1 student, you can participate in OPT in two different ways:



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- **Pre-completion OPT:** You may apply to participate in pre-completion OPT after you have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year at a college, university, conservatory, or seminary that has been certified by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) to enroll F-1 students. You do not need to have had F-1 status for the one full academic year; you can satisfy the “one full academic year” requirement even if you had another nonimmigrant status during that time.

If you are authorized to participate in pre-completion OPT, you may work (20 hours or less per week) while school is in session. You may work full time when school is not in session.

- **Post-completion OPT:** You may apply to participate in post-completion OPT after completing your studies. If you are authorized for post-completion OPT, you must work part time (at least 20 hours per week) or full time.

Impact of Pre-completion OPT Employment Authorization on Requests for Post-completion OPT at the Same Education Level

If you have already received 1 year of part-time (20 hours per week) pre-completion OPT, the total time of full-time OPT still available would be reduced by 6 months, 50% of the previously authorized year at the same education level. In this scenario, you would only be entitled to a remaining period of 6 months full-time post-completion OPT employment authorization.

If you have already received 1 year of full-time (40 hours per week) pre-completion OPT, the total time of full-time optional practical training still available would be reduced by 1 year, 100% of the previously authorized year at the same education level. In this scenario, you would not be entitled to any period of post-completion OPT employment authorization.

STEM OPT Extension

If you have earned a degree in certain Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, you may apply for a 24-month extension of your post-completion OPT employment authorization if you:

- Are an F-1 student who received a STEM degree included on the [STEM Designated Degree Program List \(PDF\)](#);
- Are employed by an employer who is enrolled in and is using E-Verify; and

- Received an initial grant of post-completion OPT employment authorization based on your STEM degree.

If you are interested in applying for a STEM OPT extension, please see our [Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students \(STEM OPT\)](#) page for more information.

Applying for OPT

Generally, you must:

1. Request that your designated school official (DSO) at your academic institution recommend the OPT. Your DSO will make the recommendation by endorsing your Form I-20, Certification of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status, and making the appropriate notation in the [Student and Exchange Visitor Information System \(SEVIS\)](#).
2. Properly file [Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization](#) with USCIS, accompanied by the required fee and the supporting documentation as described in the form instructions.

When to apply

| If you are applying based on a... | For... | Then you... |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| STEM degree | Pre-completion OPT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must apply after your DSO enters the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record, and May apply up to 90 days before you complete a full academic year, as long as you do not start OPT employment until you complete one full academic year. |
| | Initial post-completion OPT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must apply after your DSO enters the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record, and Must apply within 30 days after your DSO enters the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record, and May apply up to 90 days before you complete your degree, but no later than 60 days after you complete your degree. |
| | STEM OPT extension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must apply after your DSO enters the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record, and Must apply within 60 days after your DSO enters the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record, and May apply up to 90 days before your current OPT employment authorization expires. |

| If you are applying based on a... | For... | Then you... |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Non-STEM degree | Pre-completion OPT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must apply after your DSO enters the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record, and May apply up to 90 days before you complete a full academic year, as long as you do not start OPT employment until you complete one full academic year. |
| | Post-completion OPT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must apply after your DSO enters the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record, and Must apply within 30 days after your DSO enters the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record, and May apply up to 90 days before you complete your degree, but no later than 60 days after you complete your degree. |

You may not begin your pre- or post-completion OPT until after we approve your Form I-765 and you receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

If you file your STEM OPT extension application on time and your OPT period expires while your extension application is pending, we will automatically extend your employment authorization for 180 days. This automatic 180-day extension ceases once USCIS adjudicates your STEM OPT extension application.

Transferring to a Different School or Beginning Study at Another Educational Level

If you transfer to another school or begin studies at another educational level (for example, you completed a bachelor's degree and are starting a master's program), your authorization to engage in OPT employment

will automatically terminate. SEVP will inform USCIS of the termination date, and USCIS will terminate your EAD accordingly.

Although your authorization to engage in optional practical training will end, as long as you comply with all requirements for maintaining your student status, your F-1 status will not be affected by USCIS terminating your EAD. Maintaining your student status includes not working on a terminated EAD, as the termination means that you are no longer authorized to work in the United States using that OPT EAD. Working in the United States without authorization has serious consequences, including removal from the country and reentry bars. Also, remaining in the United States in violation of your lawful nonimmigrant status could lead to an accrual of unlawful presence. Please see [USCIS Changing Policy on Accrued Unlawful Presence by Nonimmigrant Students and Exchange Visitors](#) for more information regarding termination of your employment authorization under OPT and any impacts on your student status, including the possible accrual of unlawful presence.

If you feel that your EAD has been wrongfully terminated, would like to request reconsideration of the EAD termination, or if you have other questions, see your DSO.

Cap-gap Extension for F-1 Students with Approved H-1B Petitions

If you are an F-1 student with a timely filed H-1B petition and change of status request, and your F-1 status and employment authorization will expire before the change of status to H-1B occurs (typically Oct. 1), you may be eligible for a cap-gap extension. Go to our [Cap-Gap Extension](#) page for more information.

For more information, please see the [USCIS Policy Manual](#).

Last Reviewed/Updated: 11/25/2024